

**Media Representation: Health and Body Images (incl. Eating Disorders)**

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**Abstract**

The current chapter presents a review on the portrayal of appearance ideals in popular entertainment media. Literature on the components of the ideal appearance in popular media and the nature of portrayals of appearance standards in popular media is examined. First, study findings on the characteristics of appearance ideals presented in the media demonstrate that popular media frequently glamorize curvaceously thin female and mesomorphic male characters with flawless faces and a suntanned White or lighter Black skin tone. Second, younger characters are more likely to adhere to appearance standards in media content than older characters. Moreover, the ideal appearance is considered to be malleable. Characters with an ideal appearance also outperform characters deviating from appearance standards at a sexual, social and professional level. Lastly, appearance standards in the media are inherently related to stereotypes on gender and ethnicity. Several recommendations for future research are provided.

*Keywords.* Appearance standards, entertainment media, body image, slimness, muscularity

A substantial part of children's, adolescents' and adults' daily lives is devoted to using entertainment media. Entertainment media in Western countries are, according to numerous content analyses, important sources of appearance-ideals representations (e.g., Fouts & Burggraf, 2000; Yan & Bissell, 2014). Traditional mass media, such as television, and newer media, such as video games, persistently depict a homogenous view of appearance characteristics that are considered ideal for men and women. Moreover, the male and female appearance ideals presented in the media are accompanied by messages informing the user why the portrayed appearance is ideal, how it can be achieved, and in what way it fits with other normative, but stereotypical standards on, for instance, sexual roles (e.g., Dallesasse & Kluck, 2013; Dill & Thill, 2007; Labre & Walsh-Childers, 2003).

For the past three decades, the pervasive portrayal of appearance ideals in popular media has been a critical societal concern as exposure to these ideals is expected to relate to suffering from mental health disorders, such as depression. More specifically, according to body image literature (e.g., Grabe, Hyde, & Ward, 2008), exposure to appearance ideals leads media users to internalize the promoted appearance ideals as their own personal standards. The appearance promoted in media content becomes the appearance that a media user thinks he or she is ought to resemble. Subsequently, media users will compare their own appearance to their ought appearance. This comparison may result in feelings of dissatisfaction because of discrepancy between one's own and ought appearance (e.g., Grabe et al., 2008). Although media represent appearance ideals as achievable, they are rather unrealistic to achieve in reality (e.g., Greenberg, Eastin, Hofschire, Lachlan, & Brownell, 2003). This process may result in an unhealthy body image.

Overall, empirical research (see for instance Grabe et al., 2008) has supported that exposure to appearance ideals in media content affects a variety of negative outcomes related to body image, e.g., internalization of unrealistic body ideals, body dissatisfaction, self-

objectification, body surveillance, excessive dieting, excessive exercising, eating disorders, muscle dysmorphia, and use of anabolic-androgenic steroids. Such mental and physical body disorders have become important matters in the current society as a substantial number of adults, adolescents and even children suffers from them. For instance, a recent American study among 52,677 adults showed that more than half of the women and 40% of men believed that their weight was too high. One in ten men and two in ten women also believed that their body was unattractive (Fredrick, Peplau, & Lever 2006). Moreover, eating disturbances have already been found among American girls as young as nine years of age (Deleel et al., 2009).

A comprehensive understanding of how characters adhering to appearance standards are showcased in media content is important to understand the role of media ideals in these body disorders. More precisely, it is important to know which appearance components are idealized in the media and how common these components are in the actual population of media users. Moreover, contextual features of the messages in which characters with ideal appearances occur can learn us how appearance standards relate to other biased messages that are presented in the media. They may even identify groups of media users that may be more susceptible for the influence of exposure to appearance ideals in media content. Overall, such scholarly knowledge is likely to fuel content-focused effect research. Surprisingly, however, there has been limited systematic effort to synthesize what we currently know about characters adhering to appearance standards in popular media content. Therefore, the current review aims to examine the components of the ideal appearance presented in popular media content and the context in which characters with an ideal appearance are portrayed in popular media content. To conclude, this review provides recommendations for future research.

### **The Components of the Ideal Appearance in Popular Media Content**

The components of the ideal appearance in popular media content all have in common that they are not representative of characteristics of the appearance of the actual population. The literature has shown that such ideal appearance characteristics relate to a variety of characteristics, ranging from an individual's weight to one's skin tone and hairstyle. The most pervasive marker of an unrealistic ideal appearance is weight. Popular media frequently overrepresent men and women with low body fat. For instance, research has demonstrated that up to 47% of the male characters in American reality television programs (Dallesasse & Kluck, 2013) and 76% of the female characters in Canadian sitcoms (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000) have low body fat. More precisely, the American study on popular reality television shows reported that male characters were twice as likely to have average to low body fat as compared to their male counterparts in the U.S. population (Dallesasse & Kluck, 2013). In addition, the Canadian study (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000) reported that sitcoms represent female characters with below-average weight three times as often as compared to their prevalence in the Canadian population. Another study on fictional television series that are popular in the U.S. added that the coverage of underweight female characters was even six times the proportion of underweight women in the American population (Greenberg et al., 2001).

Studies comparing the prevalence of underweight characters in popular European media content to statistics of the European population are currently scarce. However, literature on the occurrence of characters with low body fat in European television and print media (e.g., Vandenbosch, Vervloessem, & Eggermont 2013; Yan & Bissell, 2014) suggests a similar trend of overrepresenting underweight individuals. Moreover, a study that investigated cover models of *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* in eleven countries demonstrated that European cover models are more frequently depicted as thin as compared to North American and Asian models (Yan & Bissell, 2014). Nevertheless, thinness was prevalent in all countries (Yan & Bissell, 2014).

Recent literature has argued that weight is not the only unrealistic component regarding ideal body curves. For women, Harrison (2003) pointed at the importance of having a curvaceously thin body characterized by a well-shaped bust, small hips and low body fat. For men, the so-called mesomorphic body not only includes low body fat, but also muscularity (i.e., muscular arms, broad-shouldered chest and athletic legs) and a narrow waist (Dallesasse & Kluck, 2013). The prevalence of curvaceously thin female and mesomorphic male bodies has been reported in several content analyses studying American and European media. One Belgian study on music entertainment television demonstrated that one quarter of the examined scenes (25.9%) portrayed curvaceously thin women and/or mesomorphic men in a sexually oriented way (Vandenbosch et al., 2013). Moreover, studies have reported that curvaceously thin women and muscular men are overrepresented as compared to actual rates in the population. Male main reality television characters are, for instance, twice as likely to be muscular as compared to the U.S. male population (Dallesasse & Kluck, 2013).

In addition, some scholars have suggested that tallness (i.e., having long legs for women and being tall for men) is also a central feature of the ideal body shape that is promoted in popular media (e.g., Dittmar, Lloyd, Dugan, Halliwell, Jacobs, & Cramer, 2000). However, research is lacking to empirically substantiate these suggestions. It would be interesting to systematically examine this potential characteristic of the ideal appearance in media, though: The occurrence of concerns about one's height in men and women suggest tallness may also be a component of the contemporary ideal appearance (Jacobi & Cash, 1994).

Apart from body shape, other appearance features are also subjected to narrowly defined appearance standards in media content. A spotless face that has no irregularities or pimples is a characteristic of characters glamorized for their appearance in media popular among early adolescents, such as Disney and Nickelodeon programs (e.g., Northup &

Liebler, 2010). Moreover, with regard to skin color, having a sun tanned skin is considered ideal for White individuals (Chapman, Marks, & King, 1992) whereas having a lighter skin is considered ideal for Black individuals (Baker, 2005; Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang, 2009).

Regarding the latter, American research studying Black characters featured in rap music videos showed that respectively 17% and 34% of the male and female characters had a lighter skin tone (Conrad et al., 2009). A lighter skin tone for Black individuals as well as a sun tanned skin for White individuals can be reached by rather unhealthy modification behaviors, such as using skin bleaching products or a sun bed.

Lastly, it seems plausible that particular hairstyles are considered as more ideal than others in the media, though, research is lacking on such ideal coiffed hairstyles. Two studies did suggest that American television and print media (i.e., music videos and advertisements) glamorize African American women that flatten their hair as opposed to those with more natural curly hair (Baker, 2005; Conrad et al., 2000). Moreover, Canadian research has reported that men's lifestyle magazines regularly contain advertisements on products that reduce hair loss and thus prevent baldness in men (Ricciardelli, Clow, & White, 2010).

In sum, the ideal appearance in popular media content is multidimensional and contains standards on body fat, body shape, face and skin tone. Media glamorize curvaceously thin female and mesomorphic male characters with flawless faces and a suntanned White or lighter Black skin tone. To adhere to these demanding appearance standards, media users may consider taking rather extreme measures, such as plastic surgery, to obtain, for instance, the ideal body shape or face.

### **Contextual Features of Portrayals of Appearance Standards in Popular Media Content**

The literature points at four important contextual features of portrayals of appearance standards in media content: (a) younger characters are more likely to adhere to appearance standards than older characters, (b) characters with an ideal appearance are often not only

complemented for their appearance, but also outperform other individuals in various domains, (c) an ideal appearance is malleable and can be reached by any individual that is prepared to work for it, and (d) standards on appearance are compatible with stereotypical norms regarding gender and ethnicity. The contextual features of appearance ideals are important, because they inform us on which media users may particularly learn from portrayals of appearance standards in the media and how these standards relate to other biased messages in the media. Each of these contextual features will be discussed in more detail below.

**Media characters with an ideal appearance are young.** Appearance standards have been systematically reported to be presented among adolescents or young adults (e.g., Greenberg et al., 2003). A study of Nortup and Liebler (2010) on television shows targeted at children and adolescents and broadcasted across several countries in Europe and the U.S. reported a remarkable negative association between a character's age and weight; The younger the character, the lower its body size. To illustrate, 81% of the female characters aged 10 to 22 were underweight, while this was only true for 48% of women aged 23 to 30 and 10% of the women aged 31 to 69. Literature thus demonstrates that adolescents and young adults, a group characterized by changes in body physique (e.g., development of muscles and breasts, occurrence of zits), emotional instability and explorative behavior to build one's own (sexual) identity are particularly the target of appearance standards in media content. Given the developmental tasks of this age group, many scholars (e.g., Labre & Walsh-Childers, 2003) have expressed concerns about the focus on young individuals in representations of appearance ideals in the media.

**Media characters with an ideal appearance are portrayed as generally successful in life.** Media characters with an ideal appearance also have other "advantages" besides their flawless looks. These advantages occur as inherent characteristics of the character complying



with contemporary appearance standards. A first characteristic refers to sexual attractiveness. Characters with an ideal appearance are presented as sexually attractive (e.g., Vandenbosch et al., 2013; Yan & Bissell, 2014), which according to the American Psychological Association is part of the general practice of sexualization. For instance, media characters adhering to appearance standards are likely to be scantily dressed, inviting media users to enact a sexual gaze at their well-proportioned bodies (e.g., Vandenbosch et al., 2013). A study on images in American gaming magazines showed not only that 59.9% of the female video game characters were curvaceously thin, but also that 38.7% of the portrayed women wore a provocative attire (Dill & Thill, 2007). Although to a lower extent, 8.1% of the male characters were also scantily dressed (Dill & Thill, 2007). Recently, American research has revealed that profile pictures posted on social networking sites displayed more body parts when the body size of the subject on the photo decreased (Hall, West, & McIntyre, 2012). Furthermore, the sexual attractiveness of characters with an ideal appearance has been emphasized by presenting characters deviating from appearance standards as less sexually attractive. For instance, Greenberg et al. (2003) demonstrated that larger body characters in American prime-time television shows were less likely to be covered in affection-focused behavior. Larger body characters were also less frequently shown talking about dating.

Apart from the observation that individuals with an ideal appearance are successful in sexually attracting romantic partners, the literature has also demonstrated that they achieve better at a professional level, are socially more competent and particularly possess qualities that define a “good person” (e.g., Greenberg et al., 2003; Herbozo, Tantleff-Dunn, Gokee-Larose, & Thompson, 2004). For instance, as compared to thin characters, larger individuals in popular American fictional television content have higher chances of being unemployed and are less frequently shown talking with friends (Greenberg et al., 2003). Also, characters who are not necessary obese but do not correspond to the appearance standard of having a

spotless, appealing face are rather presented as being evil in popular American books and movies targeted at children (Herbozo et al., 2004). Similarly, the study of Northup and Liebler on children television shows (2010) indicated that verbal messages about characters adhering to the thin body ideal informed American viewers about their “good” personality. Overall, individuals with an ideal appearance are not only glamorized for complying with appearance standards, but are also depicted as being more successful in life than individuals deviating from appearance standards.

**The ideal appearance is portrayed as malleable in the media.** A third important recurring theme in media messages depicting appearance standards is the suggested malleability of one’s appearance. While several studies have demonstrated that idealized appearance characteristics provide a distorted representation of the physical features of the actual population, the ideal appearance is falsely represented as achievable in magazine, television and online media content. More precisely, appearance standards are portrayed as attainable under the condition that a media user follows “expert” advice on using beauty products (e.g., Labre & Walsh-Childers, 2003) or guidelines to manage body shape, and, in particular, one’s weight and muscularity (e.g., Ricciardelli et al., 2010). Notably, the provided advice on how one can reach appearance standards is presented under the guise of improving one’s overall quality of life and, especially, one’s physical health (Labre & Walsh-Childers, 2003; Ricciardelli et al., 2010; Yan & Bissell, 2014). Given the negative health outcomes related to exposure to appearance ideals in the media, the latter trend may be particularly troubling.

An example of a study on malleable appearance ideals is the qualitative study of Labre and Walsh-Childers (2003) on the textual content of websites of American teenage fashion magazines. These scholars found that girls were indirectly sent the message that their natural appearance does not comply with current beauty standards and that additional efforts

are needed to create an ideal appearance. The articles posted on the studied websites assisted girls in complying with appearance standards by providing numerous tips on handling curly hair, concealing a zit, and getting lost of unwanted body fat. Research studying male ideals in magazine content has also suggested that the ideal male appearance is malleable. In this view, a Canadian study showed that approximately one out of twelve pages (8.2%) in men's lifestyle magazines portray a malleable male ideal appearance by covering advertisements and articles that promote diets and provide nutritional advice on developing a muscular body shape (Ricciardelli et al., 2010). Apart from magazine content and websites of magazines, literature has also reported on reality television shows in which men and women reach contemporary appearance standards by means of make-up, a new clothing style, and even cosmetic surgery.

Together, the literature has informed us that the ideal appearance is showcased in print, televised and online media as attainable for every individual that is motivated to comply with contemporary appearance standards.

**Portrayals of appearance ideals in the media relate to stereotypes on gender and ethnicity.** Appearance ideals are inherently related to stereotypes on gender and ethnicity. Regarding gender, appearance standards in the media are highly compatible with the stereotypical heterosexual roles that are attributed to men and women in American and European sexual media content (e.g., Conrad et al., 2009; Vandebosch et al., 2013). Sexual stereotypes describe women as being rather passive in sexual interactions, acting sexually submissive toward men and functioning as objects of the male gaze whose primary instrument to attract male counterparts is their "appearance." Men are portrayed as active in sexual interactions, dominant towards women and particularly interested in women for their sexually attractive body. These stereotypical roles are related to portrayals of women's and men's appearances in two ways.

First, the sexual role stereotype that appearance is more important for women to attract a sexual partner than for men is supported by the prevalence of female versus male appearance ideals as well as the contextual features that accompany the portrayal of appearance ideals.

Regarding the prevalence of female and male appearance ideals, women more frequently correspond to appearance standards than men. This observation is well-documented in practically all studies examining appearance standards for both male and female characters (e.g., Conrad et al., 2009; Dill & Thill, 2007; Vandebosch et al., 2013). For instance, a greater proportion of women has been shown to adhere to appearance standards regarding skin tone and unnatural hair styles in American television content (e.g., Conrad et al., 2009). Another example is the finding that female characters are nearly three times as likely to be underweight than male characters in American television shows (Greenberg et al., 2001). Because female characters more often conform to appearance standards, media users may learn that these standards are more important for women than for men.

Regarding contextual features of portrayals of appearance standards in media content, literature has demonstrated that these features especially stress the importance of an ideal female appearance to be (sexually) successful among men. For instance, the appearance standard of body shape is more often emphasized in women by sexy clothing than in men (e.g., Dill & Thill, 2007). Moreover, research on dialogues between television characters found that men regularly express their valuing of physical attractiveness in women but also their disliking of women who deviate from appearance standards. In this view, Canadian research on sitcoms reported that female characters who do not correspond to the slim ideal receive negative comments about their weight more frequently from male characters than female characters with a thin body. The study explained these findings by referring to gender

stereotypes (e.g., the importance of physical attractiveness for women to be successful among men, Fouts & Burggraf, 2000).

Second, the ideal body shape focuses on thinness for women, while the ideal body shape is characterized by muscularity for men. These physical body standards correspond to women being rather submissive and in need for “protection,” while men are showcased in sexual stereotypical media content as rather strong and dominant which is emphasized by their muscular strength (Vandenbosch et al., 2013).

In terms of stereotypes on ethnicity, consistent evidence has emerged in American research that appearance standards portrayed in television and print media reflect stereotypes describing White individuals as more successful than individuals from other origins (e.g., Yan & Bissell, 2014). In this view, appearance characteristics of White characters have been shown to be more often portrayed as appearance ideals than appearance characteristics of characters from other origins in advertisements of American women’s and men’s magazines, and Disney and Nickelodeon television shows (Baker, 2005; Northup & Liebler, 2010). Such portrayals suggest Whiteness is the norm for appearance ideals and underrepresent individuals of color as being “beautiful.” Furthermore, appearance standards of non-White characters particularly favor Eurocentric features, and thus characteristics that cause one to look more “Westernized” (e.g., double eyelids for Asians, flat hair for Black individuals) (Baker, 2005; Conrad et al., 2009; Yan & Bissell, 2014). The study of Conrad et al. in the U.S. (2009) even showed that the latter observation is related to gender stereotypes. Black women in rap music videos were found to have more flat hair, a thinner nose and a lighter skin color as compared to Black men.

Overall, stereotypes of gender and ethnicity are part of portrayals in media that show characters with an ideal appearance.

### **Future Directions in Research on Portrayals of Characters with an Ideal Appearance in the Media**

This review indicated that there is a substantial body of research on the portrayal of appearance standards in the media. The literature shows that standards in the media define curvaceously thin women and mesomorphic men as individuals with an ideal body. A flawless face and a suntanned White or lighter Black skin tone are also part of contemporary appearance standards. Furthermore, characters adhering to appearance standards in the media are young. Their ideal appearance is considered malleable and the result of “hard” work. Moreover, characters with an ideal appearance outperform characters deviating from appearance standards at a sexual, social and professional level. Portrayals of characters with an ideal appearance also match stereotypes on gender and ethnicity.

This review thus shows that research has documented the incidence of appearance standards in the media and the nature of portrayals of appearance standards in the media. However, this review has also identified several critical gaps in the literature. These gaps highlight, at least, three major directions for future research.

**Increased attention to the multidimensional ideal appearance.** First, research has well-documented appearance standards regarding body shape and weight (e.g., Dallesasse & Kluck, 2013; Fouts & Burggraf, 2000). However, we still lack knowledge on which and how other appearance features are glamorized in the media. A handful of studies (e.g., Conrad et al., 2009) has offered some first insights on appearance standards regarding skin color, skin type, body height and hair style, but overall attention is limited. As appearance norms on these components of the body and the face are also of relevance for developing an unhealthy body image, further research attention on the different dimensions of the ideal appearance is needed. Moreover, research is warranted to monitor the development of new appearance

standards. As the standards increase, appearance ideals become increasingly unrealistic to achieve, acquiring more extreme measures to comply with these demanding standards.

**A more diverse and integrated approach for the contextual elements of messages on an ideal appearance.** Second, when studying appearance-ideals representations in media content, it is crucial to not only document their prevalence, but also to investigate the nature of the messages in which the appearance standards appear. To date, an emerging body of research has started to investigate how characters adhering to appearance standards are described in textual/audio media content, and how such contextual features may reinforce their status as ideals. Regarding the latter, studies have explored how complying with appearance standards relates to performances at a sexual, social and academic level (e.g., Greenberg et al., 2003). Moreover, it would be interesting to examine whether the outperformance nature of characters with an ideal appearance is also found in other domains, such as in physical performances.

Furthermore, research has reported on the malleability component of contemporary appearance ideals in reality television, magazines and online websites of magazines, but less is known about how malleability is suggested in other media genres, such as fictional television shows, movies, blogs and social media. For instance, movies or blogs telling a story on how an ugly duckling transforms into a beauty are likely to enhance the perceived malleability of idealized appearance components. In addition, a comprehensive study on how stereotypes on gender and ethnicity relate to the outperformance nature of young characters with an ideal (malleable) appearance would provide interesting and, even, critical insights in the dynamics of contextual features of representations of appearance standards in the media. Such study may inform us on the various components of the script that media users learn about how characters with an ideal appearance are expected to act, think and organize their overall life.

**Need to address differences across media types.** Third, existing research suggests that media types differ in the extent to which characters adhere to appearance standards. For instance, while American primetime fictional television programs have been documented to overrepresent men with low body fat (Greenberg et al., 2003), American reality television programs have been shown to overrepresent such men more than twice as much (Dallesasse & Kluck, 2013). However, as scholars have cautioned, a comparison on the prevalence of appearance ideals across different studies is challenging. Different measurement of appearance ideals may explain different study findings rather than characteristics of the media type. A set of content analyses applying a consistent coding procedure to study the occurrence of appearance standards in different types of media is thus required to compare differences between such media types.

Moreover, different media formats have different features and may thus differ in how they depict appearance ideals. To illustrate, music videos are rather short in length and have thus less room for story- and personality development. Television shows and movies present appearance ideals within a narrative context that stimulates personality development of the featured character. Arguably, the narrative context may enhance relating appearance standards to outstanding personalities. On the other hand, the short format of music videos has been described as a supportive environment for sexual gender stereotypes (e.g., Vandenbosch et al., 2013). Future research on how different features of media content enhance particular contextual characteristics of portrayals of appearance standards is thus needed. Such research may further increase our understanding of why differences in the influence of different media types occur and stimulate content-based effect research that is sensitive to differences in media formats.

Furthermore, discussions on the depictions of appearance ideals in media content have so far particularly focused on the traditional media formats of television and magazines.



Research is lacking on whether appearance ideals may also be present in radio talk shows and lyrics of popular songs. Moreover, the media landscape has transformed considerably during the last decade. Media ideals are now not only promoted in traditional media, but also in newer media formats, such as online video games and social networking sites. These media have unique features that differ from those of traditional media and bring along new research questions. For instance, little is known about the context in which characters with an ideal appearance in video games appear. A particular important, but understudied, contextual characteristic of this medium is the role of the character adhering to appearance standards, i.e., a random game character (functions as a decorative object) or main character (= avatar). The perspective of the avatar (playing with a third-person avatar vs. a first-person avatar) also encompasses differences for the visibility of the appearance of the avatar during game play and is thus important to study.

In addition, a unique feature of social media, such as social networking sites, is that the content of social media is created by one's own peers. Initial American evidence suggests that these peers take into account contemporary appearance standards when posting images of themselves online (Hall et al., 2012). Research on how appearance standards in social media relate to being young, being successful, malleability and stereotypes on gender and ethnicity is lacking. As developmental literature indicates that peers are important socialization agents for adolescents, research is warranted to investigate whether the contextual features of appearance ideals in traditional media also occur in adolescents' social media.

### **Conclusion**

In short, an accumulating body of research has demonstrated the incidence of appearance ideals in popular media content. Efforts have been made to bring perspective to the nature of media messages that depict appearance standards. However, we are only starting to fully grasp the complexities of the multidimensional ideal appearance and the contextual features

of appearance-focused messages. It will be important for researchers to further study the representations of appearance ideals as media effect theories hypothesize that such portrayals will contribute to users' perceptions of appearance standards. Based on cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994), body image literature predicts that media users will consider the appearance standards (that are falsely presented as attainable) as realistic portrayals of appearance characteristics of the population. Moreover, the principles of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997) suggest that the frequent portrayal of (malleable) appearance ideals teaches users about the contemporary norms regarding appearance. The presence of vicarious verbal reinforcements that reward adhering to appearance standards in media contents will further intensify media users' endorsement of contemporary appearance standards (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000). Moreover, the knowledge that is learned about appearance will be organized in media users' mind in the form of appearance-schema's. Based on schema theory (Huesmann, 1988), scholars expect that these appearance schema's will guide individuals' evaluations of their body and behavior (e.g., exercising, dieting, using beauty products). Together, the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors learned from appearance ideals in popular media content will contribute to how media users perceive and behave themselves.

As the body image that is shaped by media ideals appears to be inherently related to body disorders, continued research attention to appearance standards in popular televised, print, and online media contents remains highly warranted. In particular, future efforts that unravel conditions that explain which media portrayals of appearance ideals exert the most harmful impact will increase our understanding of how we can protect media users.

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